

Biography of musician Baligh Hamdi

Prepared and presented

Mohi El-Din Ibrahim



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introduction :

Why the biographies of stars? Is it because they are merely enjoyable tales we turn to when the present weighs us down, or shining images from a bygone era we recall to ease the burden of reality? Or is it because we need now, more than ever, to follow in their footsteps of struggle and work, to see how they rose from humble beginnings to become Egypt's soft power, illuminating the world with their names, melodies, and voices? The truth goes beyond merely reminiscing or telling a story; the need for them today is existential, for they were not just artists; they were the conscience, voice, and shining face of the nation in the eyes of the world. When we revisit the biographies of these greats, we do not return to the past as a bygone era, but rather as a present energy that can illuminate our path to the future. Anyone who reads the journey of a great star realizes that creativity is not a fleeting gift, but rather the fruit of struggle, patience, and suffering, and that when art is honest, it

becomes more powerful than any political discourse or fleeting ideology. Perhaps most importantly, these stars have, at some point, become a mirror of Egypt's own soul, a condensed image of its collective consciousness, and a living example of how culture and art can transform into a soft power that exerts profound influence at home and abroad. Today, we are in dire need of reclaiming these values. In a time when speed has overwhelmed depth, superficiality has overwhelmed substance, and fascination with the fleeting has trumped contemplation of the lasting, turning to the biographies of the greats becomes an act of spiritual resistance. Not because we dwell on nostalgia, but because we are reclaiming the meaning of struggle in a time when determination has diminished. We see how a star like Baligh Hamdi was not born at the pinnacle of glory, but rather in a humble, working-class neighborhood, then ascended step by step, proving that genius is not an imposed destiny, but rather a daily, continuous effort, and that the path to

immortality always begins with a small seed planted by a heart that believes in its talent. Perhaps the most beautiful thing about the lives of stars is that they are not mythical beings far removed from us. Rather, they are human beings like us, carrying our hopes and pains, our stumbles and our rises. Yet, they added something that no one else could: they transformed their lives into music, poetry, painting, or theater, thus becoming more enduring than time itself. Herein lies the philosophy of recalling their lives: we are not celebrating individuals, but rather the human ability to transform individual experience into collective meaning, private conscience into public conscience, and fleeting moment into extended eternity. In this context, Baligh Hamdi appears not just as a great composer, but as one of the most prominent examples of this transformation. He lived as a natural son of Egypt, carrying within his soul the sounds of its popular streets, its national anthems, its joys and sorrows, then shaped them all into melodies that still

resonate today. Baligh was not just a composer of tunes; he was a poet using the language of music, a Sufi who worshipped with his strings, and a philosopher who saw in song a mirror of existence. Hence, reading his biography is not a journey through the life of an individual, but rather a journey into the soul of Egypt over a full half-century. When we recall Baligh's biography, we are in fact recalling pivotal moments in our history: the 1967 setback, which he expressed in "The Day Has Passed," the 1973 victory he embodied in "Long Live the One Who Said," the love he embraced in "The Story of Love" and "The Black Eyes," the popular folklore he revived in "Ala Hasb Wedad Qalbi," and the homeland he sang about in "Ya Habibi Ya Masr." All of these are not just songs; they are emotional documents that record the pulse of Egypt as history books have never recorded. Hence, studying Baligh is not a study of the art of an individual, but rather a reading of an entire era through his music. Baligh was a living example of how art is a soft

power, but also a hard power in moments of truth. His patriotic melodies became true slogans for the people in the streets, instilling hope and awakening the spirit of resistance. His popular melodies became the voice of the common people, and his emotional tunes became the voice of lovers. In every field, Baligh was the voice of the community, because he did not treat art as a luxury, but as a message. Here, he meets the Sufi dimension, for the true Sufi sees that his life is not for him alone, but for God and the people, and Baligh lived this meaning through his music. The question, "Why the biographies of the stars?" finds its answer in Baligh himself. Because when we read him, we read ourselves. When we hear his melodies, we remember that we cried, rejoiced, loved, and fought through them. He is not an individual separate from us, but rather a part of our conscience. When we reconsider his career, we reconsider our relationship with art, life, and homeland. Perhaps we will ultimately realize that reliving these biographies is not only a cultural act, but a

philosophical and spiritual one. Because when we read the life of a creative person like Baligh Hamdi, we learn that immortality is possible, that art is a path to survival, and that a person can conquer time by making meaning out of his life. This is where the value of star biographies lies: they are a mirror in which we see ourselves, and a compass by which we find our way in an age that lacks one. Thus, our journey with Baligh Hamdi begins, not as a story about a composer, but as an existential journey into a world of endless melody. A journey that reveals to us that when Egypt gives birth to a sincere artist, it grants him not only personal glory, but also the entire world an image of its spirit, making this artist a soft power that illuminates the horizon. As we read him today, we are not reliving his past, but rather reclaiming our own essence, affirming that Egypt is still capable of reborning its melodies.

Chapter One

The child who was born with a melody in his heart:

In a house in the working-class Shubra district of Cairo, on October 7, 1931, a thin, wide-eyed child was born. No one present at his birth could have imagined that this tiny creature would one day become an icon of Arabic singing and a great innovator in the structure of oriental melodies. That child was Baligh Abdel Hamid Hamdi Morsi, who would later be known as "the loving musician" or "the owner of the restless singing spirit." He was born at a time when Egypt was not just a country, but a cultural and artistic powerhouse for the Arab world. Cinema flourished, the voice of Umm Kulthum rose from the radio, dominating every home, and Abdel Wahab shone with his melodies, establishing a path for musical modernity. In this melodious environment, the child's ear was opened to sounds reminiscent of the daily rituals of life. His father, a religious government employee, was keen to ensure his children

received a good education. His mother, a quintessential Egyptian woman, carried in her voice a pure rural note, humming peasant songs from the kitchen and on the rooftop, echoes etched in the child's memory. Perhaps this was the first seed that drew him to folk music before he encountered sophisticated, organized art. From his early years, it was clear that Baligh was different. He didn't just listen to the radio like other children, but repeated melodies in his own way, knocking on wooden doors as if they were drums, and using metal plates to create rhythm. He was a child who saw a sound in everything, and in every sound a potential melody. When he entered elementary school, his teachers noticed his auditory talent, as he would pick up songs the first time and repeat them with special additions. He didn't just memorize them, but he would alter phrases and invent additional syllables. He was restless and curious, asking about the reason for the harmony of the chords and the secret of the sound's transition from the qarar to the qab. Over time, his parents realized that a different musical project lay within their home, so they

enrolled him in the Fuad I Institute of Music (later the Conservatoire) while he was still a young boy. There, Baligh began a profound journey of discovery with the oud, which would become his lifelong companion and primary means of expression. At first, his small fingers would struggle to pluck the strings, but he soon mastered the instrument with remarkable talent. Not content with the prescribed lessons, he would spend long hours practicing alone, searching for a new melodic phrase that didn't resemble what he heard from his teachers. His teachers at the institute were amazed by his ability to innovate and his innate flair for maqam coloration and tarab, as if he had been born with a ready-made "musical dictionary." Baligh was far from a reclusive child; he was passionate about social life, participating in school activities, leading the band at concerts, and sometimes singing with his delicate voice. As a teenager, he tried his luck as a singer, recording some songs on the radio. Fate had other ideas: his voice wasn't distinctive enough to earn him the status of a major singer, but his sharp intelligence quickly realized that his true strength lay in

composing. He didn't grieve or back down, but instead turned to composing with all its passion, believing that the composer is the "spiritual engineer" of the song and the one most capable of surviving. At this stage, Cairo was buzzing with a musical renaissance: Mohammed Abdel Wahab was innovating with long introductions, Al-Qasabji was introducing Western maqamat, and Zakaria Ahmed was planting the roots of popular singing in the heart of Umm Kulthum. Amidst this scene, Baligh was learning from afar, but he didn't imitate; instead, he was trying to find his own voice. He was greatly influenced by Mohamed Fawzy, who was close to him in spirit, even working with him in his early days, learning from him the flexibility of melody and the smoothness of musical phrases. He was also drawn to the Western music he heard on French radio, and his imagination began to take shape on a dual basis: authentic Eastern and renewed Western. In 1954, a major turning point in his life occurred when he composed his first famous song for the artist Fayda Kamel, titled "Leh La," which served as his introduction to the public. The song was

simple in its lyrics, but carried a bold melodic style that caught the eye, as it broke away from the prevailing traditional molds. From that moment, the press began writing about "the young composer Baligh Hamdi," and doors began to open for him. The success of "Leh La" wasn't just a stroke of luck; it announced the entry of a new talent into the scene. He then composed a series of melodies for a number of rising voices, such as Karem Mahmoud and Abdel Ghani El Sayed, before the moment that would completely change his path: meeting the brown nightingale Abdel Halim Hafez. But before we get to Abdel Halim, Umm Kulthum, and Warda, we must pause to consider Baligh's early life: a handsome young man with delicate features and a quiet voice, yet a volcano of creativity within. He always carried a small notebook in his pocket in which he wrote down his melodic ideas, drawing lines as secret symbols, then returning to it in the evening to attempt to play them. His room in the family home was like a musical laboratory, filled with the echo of strings and repeated experiments with scales. Those close to him say that he

experienced a state of ecstasy when he held the oud, closing his eyes and wandering in worlds invisible to anyone else. From the dawn of his youth, Baligh was a Sufi in his own way, viewing melody not only as a musical construct, but as a hidden prayer, or a bridge between the heart and heaven. He considered every note a gift, and his role was to faithfully craft it to offer to the people. Perhaps this spiritual dimension is what enabled him, even in his simplest popular melodies, to touch the emotions of ordinary people with rare sincerity. This is how Baligh's beginnings were shaped: the son of a working-class neighborhood, a student of a music institute, a young man searching for his identity amidst Eastern traditions and Western seductions, a failed singer yet a naturally brilliant composer, a lover of popular maqam and a student of academia, searching for the melodic phrase that best embodied his soul. From this beginning, the revolution he would later create in the history of Arabic singing would be born. His room in the family home was like a musical laboratory, filled with the echo of strings and repetitive experiments with scales.

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Chapter Two

From "Why Not" to the Gate of Glory

In the mid-1950s, Cairo was experiencing a changing rhythm; a state emerging from the July 1952 Revolution, and a new generation searching for voices that would express their dreams. Amidst this scene emerged a young man no more than twenty-three years old, carrying an oud larger than his slender body and with eyes that shone with a special sparkle. His name was Baligh Hamdi. This young man was no longer a mere conservatoire student, nor an amateur testing his voice in radio studios. He had become a composer betting on his talent and searching for a real opportunity to break out.

"Why not?"...the gate that opened

In 1954, Baligh presented his first truly popular tune for singer Fayda Kamel, titled "Leh La." The song was simple in its lyrics, yet flowing in its musical phrases, carrying a

new spirit that people had never known before; it broke the monotony of traditional melodies and introduced a vibrant, youthful touch. Suddenly, the name "Baligh Hamdi" became a household name in the artistic community. He was no longer an obscure young man, but a composer with a promising future.

The song's success was no coincidence, but rather the fruit of years of deep listening to both popular and modern music. Baligh was keen to combine the spirit of the Egyptian street with the taste of the middle class, eager for renewal. In "Why Not?", his first signature touch appeared, one that would later be repeated: a danceable rhythm combined with a delicate sense of emotion, making the listener oscillate between dance and tears.

A launch towards the stars

After "Leh La," Baligh began to reap new rewards. He sang songs composed by Karem Mahmoud and Abdel Ghani El Sayed, and then collaborated with young voices at the time, such as Moharam Fouad and Maher El Attar. No one

expected this young composer to be able to give singers the push that would put them at the forefront of the scene, but he did so boldly, as he believed that a good melody doesn't need a great singer to thrive, but rather the singer himself is the one who needs Baligh's melody to be born artistically.

Here, precisely, a personal trait emerged in Baligh: confidence in his talent to the point of defiance. He was unwilling to be viewed as a "novice," but rather spoke to the elders as equals, presenting new ideas, discussing maqamat, and experimenting with a cool head. Many in the community admired him, to the point that Mohamed Fawzy, the all-round artist, opened doors for him and embraced his first steps.

Meeting with Abdel Halim Hafez

It wasn't long before Baligh's melodies caught the attention of Abdel Halim Hafez, the brown-skinned nightingale, who was also searching for a fresh new lease

on life in song, one that departed from traditional molds. Hafez knew that his generation—the generation of the revolution—needed simpler, more spontaneous music, less burdensome than long monologues and more in tune with the language of youth. Here, need met talent: Hafez's need for a fresh melody, and Baligh's boldness to break with tradition.

Around 1957, Halim sang one of Baligh's earliest compositions, "Takhonoh," written by poet Abdel Rahman El Abnoudi. The song carried a distinct touch; a flowing melody, blending melancholy and rhythm, approaching the folk song without losing its poise. With it, the audience sensed that Abdel Halim was entering a new phase, and that behind this development lay a young man named Baligh.

But the real breakthrough came with the song "Sawaah," which Baligh composed for Abdel Halim in the early 1960s. It wasn't just a song; it was a musical revolution. Baligh drew on Egyptian folklore rhythms and added a

spiritual touch to the musical refrain, making the song resonate in the Arab psyche from the Atlantic to the Gulf. "Sawaah" wasn't an ordinary love song; it was an anthem of departure, wandering, and longing, making it timeless. Since then, Baligh has become Abdel Halim's "favorite composer," alongside Kamal El-Tawil and Mohamed El-Mougy.

Renewal fingerprint

What distinguished Baligh at this stage was not merely his ability to produce successful melodies, but rather his invention of a new form of Arabic song. He was influenced by popular folklore—particularly the chants of Upper Egypt and the Delta—and knew how to transform them into contemporary material suitable for radio and cinema. He was also fascinated by Western rhythms, particularly tango and samba, but employed them in a way that was inseparable from the Eastern character.

From here came songs like "Khaliku Fakereen Layali Zaman" and "Ala Hasab Widad Qalbi" (According to My

Heart's Love), sung by Mohamed Roshdy, which established Baligh as the "architect of modern popular song." These works set him on the path to fame, as the masses loved him not only as a composer for the elite, but also as their musical voice that expressed their pulse.

Character traits on the rise

On a personal level, Baligh lived a double life: on the one hand, a simple young man from the Shubra neighborhood, who sat in popular cafes, listening to folk singers and musicians, and collecting melodic material from them; on the other, an artist who frequented the salons of the greats, sitting with Umm Kulthum, Abdel Wahab, and Halim, discussing the secrets of art with them. This contradiction was one of the secrets of his artistic wealth: he belonged to the people with all his heart, yet at the same time he mastered the language of the greats.

Critics at that time described him as "the composer who knows no affectation." He didn't deliberately complicate

things, but rather let the melody flow spontaneously. He always said, "Melody is born in an instant, like lightning, and if you don't catch it, it's lost." Therefore, he always carried his oud with him wherever he went, for he feared that the idea would slip away.

Towards a new horizon

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, Baligh had established himself as one of the three pillars of composing alongside Mohamed El-Mougy and Kamal El-Tawil. What distinguished him from the other two, however, was his penchant for "popular experimentation," while El-Tawil was closer to classical music and El-Mougy to traditional singing. This uniqueness drew the attention of even Umm Kulthum, who heard some of his compositions with Abdel Halim and Rushdi. The result was that in the early 1960s, he was invited to compose a song for her, a turning point in his career.

But before we get to Umm Kulthum, Baligh had to complete his journey of establishing himself through

dozens of songs that became hits on everyone's lips: from "Al-Helwa Daer Shabakha" (The Beautiful One Is Flying Through Her Window) to "Fly With Us, My Heart." At that stage, he was experiencing the euphoria of his first success, but he had no idea that he was about to experience greater glory, and that the doors that opened before him with "Leh La" would lead him to the throne of Arabic composition.

Chapter Three

The Nightingale and the Beginning of the Second Revolution in Singing

When we mention Abdel Halim Hafez, the title "The Brown Nightingale" immediately comes to mind. He was the voice of the Egyptian revolutionary generation and a symbol of the passion that blended with patriotism in the 1950s and 1960s. But behind this voice, which lived on for half a century after his passing, stood a genius composer, Baligh Hamdi, who not only transformed the features of Abdel Halim's songs, but also joined him in creating the "second revolution" in Arabic singing. Just as the July 1952 Revolution was a political and social transformation, Baligh and Halim's partnership represented a musical revolution that fundamentally changed the image of song.

First Encounter: A Fateful Coincidence

Stories say that Baligh met Abdel Halim Abdel Halim through several intermediaries, including journalist

Mahmoud Awad and composer Mohamed El Mougny. Abdel Halim had heard about the young man who composed the song "Leh La" and, noticing his distinction, invited him to listen to some of his compositions. Baligh sat in front of Abdel Halim and presented a short musical phrase, which immediately caught his attention. Baligh didn't need long introductions; he knew how to compose a melody from a simple passage, making it flow naturally like the Nile.

At that moment, Abdel Halim realized that he was faced with a composer who possessed new keys to song, different from the sober style of Mohamed Abdel Wahab, the classical style of Kamal El Tawil, or even the popular style of Mohamed El Mougny. Baligh possessed something simpler and deeper: the spirit of the street and the feelings of the people, blended with a unique musical sensitivity.

"You betray him"...the beginning of the storm

Their first major collaboration was the song "Takhonoh," with lyrics by poet Abdel Rahman El Abnoudi. The song shocked audiences, combining raw emotion with audacious rhythms. The song no longer relied on extended

intonations, but instead on short, repetitive musical phrases that escalated until they became ingrained in their memories. The audience felt that Halim was speaking for them, and that Baligh was capturing their feelings with rare sincerity.

"Takhonoh" wasn't just a sentimental song; it heralded the birth of an artistic partnership that would transcend the boundaries of love and romance, encompassing patriotism, politics, and society. From that moment on, Baligh's name became synonymous with Halim's, as if they were two sides of the same coin.

"Sawah"... the voice that crossed borders

In 1966, Abdel Halim released the song "Sawaah," composed by Baligh, which served as a passport for Egyptian song to the entire Arab world. In "Sawaah," Baligh recreated the chants of Upper Egypt and the rhythms of the Delta, adding a spiritual touch. The melody blended popular music with Sufi ecstasy. It was no surprise that "Sawaah" became an anthem for generations, sung in villages and rural areas, in neighborhoods and cities, at weddings and

special occasions. Some listeners even assumed it was part of folk heritage and not the work of a young composer.

"Sawaah" proved that Baligh was not just a successful composer, but the founder of a musical project that sought to restore songs to their popular roots and present them in a modern guise. Abdel Halim was the perfect embodiment of this project, with his sensitive voice and ability to touch the hearts of the masses.

From love to homeland

Baligh and Halim's partnership wasn't limited to romantic songs. When the 1967 defeat occurred, song became a platform for resistance, with Baligh in the forefront. El-Abnoudi wrote "Ada El-Nahar," Baligh composed it, and Halim sang it with sincere tears. It wasn't just a song, but the weeping of a wounded nation and a voice that consoled a broken people.

Then came the War of Attrition, and Halim's voice rose with songs like "The Gun Spoke" and "Fedayeen," composed by Baligh. Baligh knew how to express the spirit of a soldier on

the front line and the feelings of a mother awaiting her son's return. His melodies were not mere slogans, but rather a vibrant melody, carrying within them tears, dreams, and hopes.

During the October 1973 victory, the song "Long Live the One Who Said" was a landmark, combining a simple melody with straightforward lyrics. The people sang it as if it were their national anthem. At this stage, Baligh and Halim became the voice of all of Egypt, expressing its pain and joy, its defeats and victories.

Features of a new school

What Baligh created with Abdel Halim's song was not just a successful collaboration, but rather the establishment of a new school of singing. He made the song more accessible to the listener, shorter in duration, simpler in melody, yet at the same time deeper in impact. Singing was no longer the preserve of elegant salons or grand theaters, but rather became the property of every ordinary person, who could hear it, understand it, and repeat it.

Critics have described this shift as "the second revolution in Arabic singing." The first revolution was made by Abdel Wahab and Umm Kulthum in developing the form of tarab, while the second was made by Baligh and Halim in making the song a product of its time, flowing with simplicity and direct emotion.

The human side of the relationship

Behind the melodies and successes, there was a deep human friendship between Baligh and Halim. They would sit together at night parties, exchange jokes and dreams, and discuss music, politics, and life. Halim found in Baligh a kindred spirit: a sensitive, delicate person who lived for art and gave it his all. As for Baligh, he saw in Halim "the voice worthy of carrying his melodies," and believed that he was capable of embodying his most complex emotions with astonishing simplicity.

However, this relationship was not without tension at times; Baligh was quick to anger and had a hot temper, while Halim was more diplomatic. However, these disagreements did not affect their artistic partnership; in

fact, they may have enriched it, because each respected the other and knew his or her worth.

A shared legacy that never dies

From "Takhonoh" to "Sawaah", from "Ada El Nahar" to "Aash Elli Qal", the Baligh and Halim partnership produced more than twenty timeless songs that have become part of the memory of Egypt and the Arab world. These songs were not just passing melodies, but musical documents that tell the story of an entire generation.

People understood that Abdel Halim was the voice, but Baligh was the beating heart of that voice. Together, the two created a musical revolution that will never be repeated, because they presented more than just art, but an entire life sung, with its pain and joy, its tears and dreams.

Chapter Four

Umm Kulthum - Encounter with Eternity

From the time Baligh Hamdi took his first steps in the world of composing, he knew that reaching the top meant passing through one gate: Umm Kulthum. She was not just a singer, but the "Fourth Pyramid," Egypt's greatest artistic icon and the undisputed lady of Arabic singing. Every composer dreamed of having his voice heard through her golden throat, but that wasn't easy; Umm Kulthum was strict in her choices, accepting only what befitted her history and stature.

The beginning of the dream

Since the mid-1950s, Baligh had been a young man silently contemplating the planetary phenomenon known as "Umm Kulthum." He would sit at her concerts, listening, taking notes, and wondering: How could a human larynx transform into a musical instrument capable of carrying

such ecstasy and ecstasy? He would whisper to himself, "The day must come when I sing through her voice."

But the road wasn't paved. There were guardians of the temple: Mohammed Abdel Wahab, Riad Al-Sunbati, Baligh Al-Qasabgi, and Zakaria Ahmed. These were giant names that established the foundations of the Kalthoum school. Could a young man in his twenties, barely out of his prime, find a place among them?

First meeting

Fate had other ideas. Some of Baligh's melodies, especially "Sawaah" and "Ala Hasab Wedad Qalbi," reached Umm Kulthum. She was captivated by the fresh spirit of these melodies, their resonance with the pulse of the Egyptian street. When Mohamed Fawzy nominated him to meet her, she agreed to listen to him.

Baligh sat in front of her, nervous, holding his oud, as if standing before history. But as soon as he began humming the tune "What Love?" Umm Kulthum's face changed, and she began to sing along with him. The tune was bold, a

rebellion against some of the classical forms, and had a new rhythm reminiscent of the spirit of the 1960s. She told him with her usual confidence, "The tune is beautiful... We'll work on it." That sentence was like a new birth certificate for Baligh.

"Love What?"... The First Explosion

In 1960, Umm Kulthum sang "Love, What Is It" for the first time, to Baligh's music. It wasn't just a song; it heralded the entry of a new generation into the world of Kulthum's songs. The lyrics were by Abdel Wahab Mohamed, and the melody bore all the hallmarks of Baligh: the flowing rhythm, the short, recurring phrases that linger in the heart, and the blend of traditional tarab and popular inspiration.

The audience received the song with astonishment. They were accustomed to hearing long poems and heavy melodies from Umm Kulthum, but she presented a song with a lighter, more energetic feel. Some critics objected, but most welcomed it, believing that Baligh had opened a new chapter in the history of Umm Kulthum's songs.

"Love Biography"... Immortality embodied

After the success of "Love, What Is It?", the biggest challenge arose: a long, lyrical melody worthy of Umm Kulthum's majesty, yet one that bore Baligh's innovative signature. "Seerat Al-Hob" (The Story of Love) was released in 1964, with lyrics by Mamoun Al-Shennawi. Here, Baligh's genius was revealed at its finest: a captivating musical introduction, evolving from a whisper to an explosion, and a melody that encompassed all the tones of Umm Kulthum's voice.

"Seerat Al-Hob" wasn't just a song; it was a complete musical masterpiece, combining Baligh's popular, Sufi, and modern styles. A single concert lasted for hours, with the audience in a state of endless rapture. Baligh had risen to the ranks of great composers, no longer an obscure young man, but a partner in creating Kalthoum's immortality.

"All Love"... The Last Dream

Over the years, the collaboration between Baligh and Umm Kulthum became more deeply rooted. He composed

several songs for her, such as "Ansak" and "Baeed Anak," but the most notable milestone came in 1971 with the song "Al Hob Kollo," with lyrics by Ahmed Shafiq Kamel. The song served as a final farewell; Umm Kulthum sang it in her later years, her voice showing signs of weakness, but Baligh's melody came to embrace it tenderly.

In "All Love," Baligh seemed to be writing a musical will; short, melancholy sentences embraced the singer's voice, which was fading gradually. Perhaps it was a fateful coincidence that he composed her last major composition, as if he were passing the torch to his generation.

Facing the critics

Baligh's journey with Umm Kulthum was not easy. Some conservative critics accused him of oversimplifying Umm Kulthum's melody, losing its classical depth. However, the truth is that Baligh did not seek to abolish the past, but rather to connect it to the present. He redefined the relationship between melody and Umm Kulthum's voice: it was no longer a mere display of Umm Kulthum's powerful

voice, but rather an emotional dialogue between her and the melody.

Umm Kulthum herself stated on more than one occasion that she saw in Baligh a "different talent" and that she felt comfortable singing with him. She felt that his melodies gave her greater freedom of expression and restored her to her original simplicity, without losing her dignity.

The deeper meaning of the encounter

Baligh's collaboration with Umm Kulthum was not just an artistic milestone; it was an official recognition by the "Star of the East" of a new generation of composers. It signified that the times had changed, and that Umm Kulthum herself—an icon of classical singing—was capable of opening up to the spirit of the 1960s. The encounter between Baligh and Umm Kulthum was a meeting of past and future, of eternity and modernity, of the strict classical school and the spontaneous spirit of the street.

Perhaps the most beautiful thing about it is that Baligh did not attempt to "tame" Umm Kulthum or impose his own

style on her. Rather, he allowed her to shine in her own way, while opening new windows for her. Thus, together, the two of them created a miracle: bringing history and the present together without conflict, producing timeless art.

An indelible legacy

With his compositions for Umm Kulthum, Baligh Hamdi entered the realm of immortality. "Love, What Is It?", "Love Story," "Love All of It," "Far From You," "I Forget You"... all of these songs live on today, played on the radio and sung at concerts as if they were written yesterday. They are the ultimate testament to the fact that Baligh's meeting with Umm Kulthum was no mere coincidence, but rather a historic moment that changed the course of Arabic singing. After this encounter, Baligh became not just a successful composer, but a legend. If Abdel Halim was his youthful voice, then Umm Kulthum was his gateway to immortality. From here, a new chapter in his career began, as love would enter his life through Warda Al-Jazairia, transforming singing into a personal biography intertwined with emotion.

Chapter Five

Algerian Rose - Love and Melody Together

If Baligh Hamdi's relationship with Abdel Halim Hafez represented an artistic partnership that created a musical revolution, and his relationship with Umm Kulthum represented an encounter with eternity, then his relationship with the singer Warda Al-Jazairia was something else entirely: a complete life, a blend of love and art, of fiery passion and melody born from the heart of a lover. Warda was not just a voice he sang his melodies; she was the woman he loved, married, and with whom he lived the most beautiful and difficult moments of his life.

First Encounter: From Far to Near

Warda emerged in the early 1960s as a distinct voice, coming from Algeria laden with the scent of jasmine and the heat of revolution. She was young, but her voice

possessed a rare power. Baligh heard her for the first time on the radio and was amazed by her ability to navigate between classes and her surging emotions. He told his friends that day, "This girl will have a great destiny... I will write her melodies that will make her a queen."

It wasn't long before fate brought them together in Cairo. Their eyes met, and it wasn't just artistic admiration, but the spark of early love. By that time, Baligh had become a well-known composer, collaborating with the greats, but he found in Warda what he hadn't found in anyone else: a new spirit, thirsty for life, capable of igniting melodies as love ignites the heart of a lover.

The beginning of technical cooperation

His first composition for her was "Black Eyes," written by Mohamed Hamza in 1972. This song wasn't just a hit; it heralded the birth of a new artistic duo. The melody flowed, blending tenderness and overwhelming emotion, as if it were a love story told through music. Warda sang with the sincerity of a woman in love, and Baligh

composed the melody as if he were confessing his love through the strings.

The audience immediately picked up on this chemistry; "Black Eyes" wasn't just a romantic song, but a reflection of the emotional truth between a composer and a singer. And from there, the long journey began.

Marriage: Love Turns into Destiny

In 1972, Baligh and Warda officially married. Their marriage was the talk of the art world, combining art and passion. Some described their relationship as an earthquake; both were passionate, hot-tempered, loyal in love, but quick to anger. They lived a life full of turbulent moments, but those storms always transformed into melodies.

In the marital home, the oud was as present as Warda. Their gatherings were never devoid of singing and composing. Warda would sometimes recite a fleeting poetic phrase, and Baligh would pick it up and instantly transform it into a melody. She would sing it with warmth,

and a new work would emerge. Their love was a constant laboratory for songs.

"My Story with Time"... a frank confession

Among the dozens of melodies Baligh presented to Warda, "My Story with Time" remains one of the most sincere and moving. The lyrics were written by Omar Batisha in 1973, and Baligh composed it with the spirit of a lover contemplating the vicissitudes of time. The song was like a mirror of their life together: meeting, love, joy, pain, separation, and longing.

Warda performed the song with her voice dripping with sincerity, causing the audience to cry with her, realizing that behind the words and melody lies a real, lived story, not just a poetic fantasy. "My Story with Time" was and still is considered one of Warda's most beautiful songs and one of Baligh's greatest compositions, combining artistic honesty with emotional confession.

Between jealousy and giving

Their married life wasn't easy. Jealousy was ever-present. Baligh, with his free-spirited nature, was always busy with nights out and friends, while Warda, by nature, was possessive in her love, wanting him all to herself. Many arguments broke out between them, but each one was later translated into a new melody, as if music were their only means of reconciliation.

Despite this, their relationship continued for years until they broke up. But the breakup didn't end their love, nor did it halt their artistic collaboration. Baligh continued composing for Warda even after the divorce, and she continued singing his compositions as if she were singing from her heart.

After a breakup... love never dies

Even after their official separation, Warda remained the only woman to whom Baligh publicly confessed his love. He never married anyone else, nor did he give his heart completely to anyone else. As for Warda, she would

admit in interviews that Baligh was the love of her life and that he had given her her most important melodies.

Among the tunes he presented to her after the separation were: "Betunis Bek," "Fi Yom Wa Leila," and "Ashtaroni" ... all of which were sung with greater sincerity, because the love affair had turned into an eternal relationship, transcending marriage and divorce, an artistic and spiritual relationship that would never end.

Rose as an inspiration

If Abdel Halim was the voice of the revolution and Umm Kulthum the symbol of immortality, then Warda was Baligh's human muse. With her, he poured out his deepest romantic melodies, for she was his emotional mirror. Each of her melody bore her personal imprint, so that the listener felt as if Baligh was "speaking" through her.

Warda became a romantic icon in Arabic singing thanks to Baligh, and Baligh became a great lover thanks to

Warda. They both shaped each other artistically and emotionally.

Their shared heritage

Today, when we hear "Black Eyes," "My Story with Time," or "Betouns Beek," we're not just hearing songs, but a love story written in melody. Their shared legacy is not just dozens of timeless songs, but a human lesson in how love can transform into music, and how true emotion can live forever through art.

Warda and Baligh's relationship was a special chapter in the history of Arabic singing; a chapter that can never be repeated, for it was not merely an artistic collaboration, but an entire life. As much as it was filled with pain, it was rich in melody, and as much as it witnessed disagreements, it also witnessed immortal moments of love that were transformed into songs that live in people's hearts to this day.

Chapter Six

Egyptian folklore and the voice of the land

If Baligh Hamdi's melodies for Abdel Halim Hafez created a youthful musical revolution, his melodies for Umm Kulthum placed him in the ranks of immortality, and his melodies for Warda Al-Jazairia wove a passionate love story, then his greatest and most personal project was with Egyptian folklore. Here his true genius was revealed, and here he became the "voice of the land" in the full sense of the word. Baligh was not content to be a composer of emotion or of the homeland, but rather became the creator of the story of Egypt itself: its neighborhoods, villages, fields, joys, and sorrows.

Country roots in the composer's heart

Baligh was born in the Shubra district, but he carried the sounds of the countryside in his heart since childhood. His mother used to hum peasant songs, and he used to listen to folk singers at religious festivals. This heritage remained

alive within him until, in his youth, it exploded with melodies that touched the hearts of peasants, workers, and ordinary citizens. He didn't view folklore as an "ancient heritage," but rather as a renewed spirit that he saw in every daily scene: the voices of vendors, the shouts of boatmen, the beating of drums at weddings, the groan of the flute in the fields.

With Mohamed Rushdi: Modern Popular Song

The big change came when Baligh met singer Mohamed Roshdy, who had a powerful Upper Egyptian voice, full of warmth and masculinity. Baligh found in him the perfect vessel to bring folklore to the modern stage. Their first hit was the song "Ala Hasab Wedad Qalbi" (1961), written by poet Abdel Rahman El-Abnoudi. The song was like an earthquake: a simple melodic phrase, a danceable rhythm, and honest colloquial lyrics. Suddenly, popular songs were at the heart of the radio, heard by the middle class as well as the peasants.

The songs followed: "Wasa'a Lel-Nabi," "Ya Arousa," and "Taer Ya Hawa." They all blended popular spirit with artistic

creativity, making people dance and sing at the same time. Baligh would say, "I don't just compose for the peasant, I compose with the peasant's spirit," meaning he recaptures the sincerity of emotion and spontaneity, then crafts them in a modern form.

Al-Abnoudi... the new popular word

Baligh's success with Rushdie would not have been complete without his partnership with Abdel Rahman El-Abnudi, the greatest colloquial poet. El-Abnudi wrote lyrics that captured the pulse of the Egyptian street, and Baligh composed melodies that made them resonate in the memory. The El-Abnudi-Baligh duo was a cultural revolution, restoring the prestige of Egyptian colloquial poetry as a vessel for lyrical poetry. With Rushdie as a singer, the golden triangle was completed, bringing folklore to the heart of modern song.

The voice of the earth

Baligh did not limit himself to folk songs in the narrow sense, but expanded the concept to include everything that

is "authentic Egyptian." In his songs, we hear the sad sound of the flute, like the sound of the dry earth; we hear the tambourines, like the echo of mawlids; and we hear the Upper Egyptian rhythms at weddings. He borrowed a melody, a scale, or a rhythm from every region in Egypt, creating a "musical map" of the entire country.

Even his patriotic songs carried this popular character. In "Ada Al-Nahar," for example, the melody wasn't just an anthem, but rather resembled a peasant's lamentation over his land. In "Ya Habibi Ya Masr," sung by Shadia, we find the same popular spirit: a simple melody, yet filled with melancholy and love.

The Sufi character in folklore

What distinguished Baligh was that he didn't treat folklore as mere material for joy and dance, but rather viewed it as having a Sufi dimension. He used to say, "The popular mawwal is a Sufi supplication, even if it's about love." Therefore, his melodies are filled with a spirit of ecstasy, as if floating in a space wider than the moment. In "Tayer Ya Hawa," for example, we hear joy and fun, but behind it lies

a deep melancholy that makes the song a worthy anthem for freedom.

Between simplicity and genius

Some critics accused Baligh of "simplifying" music too much. But the truth is, his genius lay in transforming simplicity into great art. He was able to take a very short musical phrase and have it resonate with people for decades. This wasn't naivety, but rather a full awareness that the power of art lies in its honesty, not its complexity.

The far-reaching effect

Baligh's popular melodies weren't just temporary hits; they became part of Egyptian identity. There isn't a wedding, celebration, or mawlid without a song from his collection being sung. Even the younger generations, who didn't live during his time, sing "Ala Hasab Wedad Qalbi" and "Tayer Ya Hawa" as if they were part of their own heritage. Baligh succeeded in turning folklore into a living, immortal material.

Baligh's folklore legacy

It could be said that Baligh's project with folklore was the deepest and most ingrained, for it was not merely an experiment, but a lifelong path. He made himself a "bridge" between the past and the present, between popular heritage and modern song. In doing so, he saved folklore from fading and transformed it into an immortal art form.

He was truly eloquent, "the voice of the earth." He did not sing the earth with his voice, but he made the earth sing through his melodies. From here we understand the secret of the immortality of his popular melodies; for they were simply an echo of the earth and its people, and will remain so as long as life endures.

Chapter Seven

Operettas and Musical Theatre - The Collective Dream

If Baligh Hamdi's journey with emotional, patriotic, and popular songs made him an icon in the public consciousness, his project with operettas and musical theater represented the "deferred dream" he had sought to achieve throughout his life: to transform music from an individual act into a collective dream, in which voice, words, dance, and image come together to express the spirit of the entire nation in a single artistic canvas.

Roots: From Childhood to Youth

From his early days at the Music Institute, Baligh was obsessed with the idea of a "grand musical scene." He didn't view a song as merely a short lyrical passage, but always imagined it could transform into a dramatic epic, with multiple voices and overlapping scales. Perhaps his early influence on Egyptian musical theater—the foundations of

which were laid by Sayyid Darwish—was a major driver of this inclination.

Sayed Darwish had left an indelible mark on the Egyptian psyche with operettas such as "The Ten Good Men" and "Scheherazade," demonstrating how art could be the voice of all people. Baligh, an heir to the popular spirit, saw himself as a continuation of this project, but with a contemporary spirit befitting his time.

"The Bride's Dowry"... the operetta that celebrated simplicity

One of his first successful experiments in this field was the operetta "The Bride's Dowry," which combined the atmosphere of popular joy with classical music. In this operetta, Baligh recaptured the sound of the Egyptian neighborhood: group singing, ululations, and drumbeats, transforming it into a complete dramatic scene. It was not just a melody, but a musical structure resembling a painting, featuring a variety of rhythms and a dialogue between voices.

The audience loved the operetta because it represented them, because it wasn't presented as a complex, elitist production, but rather as a grand, popular celebration. Here, Baligh's genius emerged: transforming popular simplicity into an artistic operetta without losing its original spirit.

"Henna Dates"... Inspiration from the popular conscience

Then came the operetta "Tamar Henna," in which Baligh drew inspiration from the rituals of popular celebrations associated with special occasions. The title song has become a hallmark of Egyptian singing, but the operetta as a whole was a complete experience: multiple voices, lyrical dialogue, folk dances, and a melody that combined joy and melancholy.

With this work, Baligh confirmed that the operetta is not just a "long piece," but rather a dramatic musical narrative with a beginning, middle, and end, telling a popular story in the language of song.

National Operetta... Art as a Battle

Baligh wasn't content with merely romantic or popular operettas, but rather moved the concept into the realm of patriotic songs. After the 1967 defeat, he felt that the Egyptian people needed a collective effort that would both comfort and motivate them. He therefore presented several patriotic operettas, some of which brought together dozens of voices in a single scene, such as "The Greater Homeland," in which several singers participated.

Baligh's goal with the national operetta was to make art a collective act parallel to the battle. While soldiers were fighting on the front lines, artists were fighting on stage and through the airwaves. The operetta was no longer a mere celebration or joy, but rather a collective anthem for the nation, built on the voice of the people, not the voice of a single individual.

Musical Theatre: The Unfulfilled Dream

Despite his great success in operettas, Baligh continued to dream of a complete musical theatrical work, one that

would rival operas worldwide but reflect the Egyptian spirit. Indeed, he embarked on numerous projects, such as the operas "Akhenaten" and "Tutankhamun," but was unable to complete them due to political and financial circumstances, followed by his famous ordeal that took him away from his homeland.

He envisioned an Egyptian theater that would present major musical works, drawing on Egyptian folk roots rather than Western imports. He wanted Sayed Darwish to be a twentieth-century heir, and for singing to transform from an individual pleasure into a collective epic. But fate did not allow him time, and this dream remained incomplete.

Technical features of Baligh's operetta

The features of his project in operetta and musical theatre can be summarized in several points:

1. **Collective**The melody is no longer for one voice, but for multiple voices interacting.
2. **Maqam diversity**Introducing more than one musical scale into a single work to reflect multiple states.

3. **rhythmic interference** Using various popular rhythms (Saidi, Delta, Bedouin) within the operetta.
4. **Drama** Make the song tell a story, not just an emotional track.
5. **dazzling simplicity** Despite its length and complexity, the melody remained relatable and easy to sing.

State Encouragement Award

It was no surprise that Baligh received the State Encouragement Award for his entire body of work in this field. The state realized that the man was not merely presenting individual songs, but rather a national cultural project that was revitalizing musical theater and making it a tool for expressing the spirit of the Egyptian community.

Baligh's operetta legacy

To this day, his operettas remain landmarks in the history of Arabic singing. The experience has not been repeated in the same spirit since his death, because Baligh was not just a composer, but a "musical director" who saw the work in its complete form: voice, rhythm, story, and drama.

Baligh sought to transform singing into a collective celebration of life, in which everyone could participate: peasants and workers, soldiers and lovers, men and women. Although his grand theatrical dream was never fulfilled, his operettas are enough to immortalize him as one of the greatest pioneers of this art form in the twentieth century.

Chapter Eight

Homeland in its melodies - from "The Day Has Passed" to "Oh My Beloved Egypt"

From the first time Baligh Hamdi touched the strings of the oud, he understood that art was not merely a personal pleasure or luxury, but a message. If his emotional melodies touched the hearts of lovers, and his popular tunes expressed the pulse of the street, his patriotic tunes were the spirit that shaped the conscience of a nation in moments of defeat and triumph. Baligh was not merely a composer of patriotic songs; he was the voice of Egypt during its most difficult times, from the 1967 setback to the 1973 victory and beyond.

"The Day Has Passed"... The Cry of a Wounded Nation

In June 1967, Egypt suffered a severe shock with its defeat by Israel. The defeat was not only military, but also psychological and spiritual. The people, who had dreamed of victory, suddenly found themselves beset by grief. This is

where art came into its own, and Baligh was at the forefront.

Abdel Rahman El Abnoudi wrote the lyrics for the song "The Day Has Passed," composed by Baligh, and sung by Abdel Halim Hafez. The song wasn't just a song; it was a patriotic elegy. The melody begins as a mournful Mawwal, gradually becoming melancholy, until it explodes into a scream of pain. When Hafez first sang it, the audience wept, feeling it reflected their collective pain.

"The Day Has Passed" was not only an anthem of sadness, but also a wake-up call: a reminder that the sun will return, and that the night will not last forever. The song was a cry, a tear, and a small hope in the heart of darkness.

"The Gun Spoke" and "Fedayeen"... the era of resistance

Baligh did not surrender to grief. His melodies soon became a tool of resistance. During the War of Attrition, he composed several songs for Abdel Halim, including "The Gun Speaks" and "Fedayeen." In these songs, we hear the

sound of battle: fast rhythms, a rousing melody, and short phrases that sound like military orders.

Baligh insisted that a patriotic song should not be a static political statement, but rather a living melody felt by both the soldier on the front and the mother in the village. His melodies were therefore simple and singable, yet charged with tremendous energy.

"My beloved Egypt"... the homeland as a mother

In the early 1970s, Shadia sang his song "Ya Habibi Ya Masr." Here, the melody rose from the confines of politics to a broader realm: the homeland as a lover, as a mother, as a beloved. The song was a mixture of tenderness, melancholy, and pride. It wasn't a battle cry, but rather a sentimental song that made love for Egypt a personal feeling for every individual.

The audience loved the song because it spoke about the homeland in the language of emotion, not slogans. Since then, "Ya Habibi Ya Masr" has become an unofficial anthem, sung in schools, at celebrations, and at national occasions.

It's one of those songs that lives on across generations because, quite simply, it links love of one's homeland to human love itself.

"Long live the one who said"... the victory anthem

When victory was achieved in October 1973, Baligh was present as usual. Mustafa Abdel Rahman wrote the lyrics to the song "Long Live the One Who Said," Baligh composed it, and Abdel Halim sang it. The song was simple and straightforward, yet it carried indescribable joy. The people didn't need a complex melody, but rather an anthem that reflected their victory.

"Long live the one who told the men to cross the canal!" became an icon of victory, broadcast in every home and repeated by soldiers and civilians alike. Baligh was able to transform a political and military moment into a general popular celebration in which everyone participated.

After October... Art as Memory

After the war, Baligh continued to compose numerous patriotic tunes, but he had already cemented his legacy:

that of a composer of the historical moment. Every turning point in Egypt's history from the 1960s to the 1970s had a tune for him. "Ada El Nahar" for sadness, "Fedai" for resistance, "Ya Habibi Ya Masr" for love, "Aash Elli Qal" for victory.

Baligh has transformed art into a nation's memory. A political event is no longer just a newspaper item, but an immortal song that people live by.

The secret of Baligh's national genius

What made his patriotic melodies immortal? This can be summarized in three points:

1. **honesty**He believed that the national anthem is not fabricated, but is born from the heart of real wound or joy.
2. **Simplicity**Short sentences, clear rhythm, so that a soldier or peasant can repeat them easily.
3. **Popular character**He borrowed its rhythms and tones from folklore, making the song a part of people's daily lives.

Baligh and the homeland... an existential relationship

For Baligh, the homeland was not just a topic he brought up on special occasions. It resided in his heart. When he was away from Egypt during his years of exile, he wrote melancholy melodies as if he were singing of longing for his mother. He believed that Egypt was not just a land or a border, but the great song he lived to sing.

Immortality through the national song

Today, decades later, Baligh's patriotic melodies are still played and sung as if they were new. At every national occasion, the voices of Halim and Shadia return to sing his tunes. This is evidence that what he presented was not a "political song tied to its time," but rather an art that was timeless because it came from the heart of his people.

He was as eloquent in patriotism as he was in love: honest to the end. In doing so, he became the "composer of the nation," the voice of Egypt when it cries and when it rejoices, when it is defeated and when it triumphs.

Chapter Nine

Ordeal and Exile - Paris, London, and the Absence of Homeland

If Baligh Hamdi lived his golden years in the 1960s and 1970s between Cairo and Beirut, composing for the greatest voices and shaping the nation's conscience, the 1980s bore him another face: the face of hardship. The homeland that had bestowed upon him all its melodies was no longer able to embrace him. From the pinnacle of glory, he found himself hounded in exile, between Paris and London, a stranger to his land, his family, and his friends. Those were the harshest years of his life, but they were also the years that revealed his profound humanity and his inner struggle between art and destiny.

**The beginning of the crisis: an issue whose chapters
have not been completed**

In the early 1980s, Baligh Hamdi's name was implicated in a case that shook the artistic community. The tragedy involved the death of Moroccan artist Samira Milian at a party held at his apartment in Cairo. Although Baligh was not a direct suspect, but merely a witness, the media hyped the story, and he suddenly found himself under suspicion.

His delicate heart could not bear this siege, and he saw no choice but to leave. He left Egypt in a hurry, thinking his absence would be temporary, but it extended for many years, living between Paris and London, far from his homeland, which he had known no other homeland.

Paris... the isolation of the great artist

In Paris, Baligh experienced a state of spiritual exile. He lived in a small apartment, surrounded by oud and leaves, but he missed everything: family, friends, and the language that was his natural air. He would tell those around him, "I am like a fish pulled from the Nile... I may breathe, but I do not live."

In Parisian cafes, he would sit for long hours, silently observing people, but inside, he was playing sad melodies. Some of these melodies remained locked away in his notebooks, and others emerged in the form of songs recorded by Warda or by Arab voices who visited him there. But he was aware that the true source of inspiration—homeland—was gone, and that his exile would not give him what Cairo could.

London...sickness and loneliness

Baligh also moved to London, where he received treatment for a liver disease that was beginning to ravage his body. The years of loneliness worsened, especially as many of his friends turned away from him, either out of fear of the case or preoccupied with their own affairs. Only Warda remained faithful, visiting him, singing his melodies, and bringing him warmth.

During those years, he wrote some of his most beautiful, melancholic melodies, as if he were recording his memoirs in melody. He would often repeat, "I yearn for

Egypt... I even miss the dusty air of Egypt," as if exile were nothing but a slow-paced prison.

Deferred Dreams: Akhenaten and Tutankhamun

Despite all he had suffered, Baligh never stopped dreaming. In Paris, he attempted to begin his long-cherished grand project: an opera about Akhenaten and Tutankhamun. He believed that Egypt deserved a world-class musical work that reflected its ancient civilization. He sat down to write the melodies and sketch the outlines, but the project remained incomplete, lacking the necessary support and stability.

This dream haunted him until his final days: to present to the world an "Egyptian opera" that reflected both the genius of the pharaohs and the spirit of modern Egypt. But he passed away before seeing this dream realized.

Heart-melting nostalgia

For Baligh, exile wasn't just a geographical relocation; it was a spiritual wound. In his gatherings with those close to him, he would sing to himself fragments of his old

melodies and then cry. He felt that the homeland that had given him everything had left him alone. He always remembered a sentence he said in one of his interviews: "I can only live in Egypt... even if you imprison me there, I would be happier than to live free, far away from it."

This nostalgia was not just an emotion, but a creative force. In his exile, he composed songs that expressed alienation and distance, as if they were letters to Egypt. Among them were tunes he presented to Warda, carrying within them a muffled groan, such as "In a Day and a Night" and "In Tunis with You."

Back... but too late

In the late 1980s, after many years of absence, Egyptian courts acquitted him of the case that had forced him from his homeland. The news was a rebirth for him, but he returned exhausted, both physically and psychologically. He returned to Cairo in 1987, but the city was no longer the same as he had left it. A new generation of singers had emerged, the rhythms had changed, and the artistic

community had become noisier and less loyal. Despite this, his fans welcomed him warmly, as he remained in their hearts their number one composer.

The effect of exile on his soul

The years of exile did not pass unnoticed. They left clear traces on Baligh: a deep sadness, a melancholy expression in every word he uttered, and physical weakness due to illness. But despite all this, he remained resilient. He did not stop composing until his final days, as if he wanted to take revenge on his exile by leaving behind melodies that would live forever.

The deeper meaning of the ordeal

Some might think that Baligh's ordeal lay in accusations or exile, but the truth is that his greatest ordeal lay in the absence of his homeland. For him, Egypt was not a place to live, but rather a "grand musical instrument," from whose heart all his melodies emerged. When he was away from it, he felt as if his strings had been cut.

But, as the Sufis say, "Out of adversity comes grace."

Alienation has made his melodies more sincere, more poignant, and more resonant with the hearts of people who know the meaning of loss and separation.

Legacy of Exile

Today, when we hear Baligh's melodies from the 1980s, we realize that they are not just music, but a spiritual autobiography. Each melody is a line in the book of his exile, and each song is a letter to his homeland. He transformed his ordeal into an immortal work of art, transforming exile into a melody that resonates in the hearts of millions.

Chapter Ten

The Silent End and an Undying Legacy

Baligh Hamdi always avoided talking about death. Perhaps because he lived his life as a perpetual festival, filled with laughter, playing music, love, and staying up late. But his body, worn down by years, exile, and illness, began to rebel. Since the late 1980s, upon his return from exile, Baligh appeared more frail. His liver, exhausted by chronic illness, began to sabotage his strength, and his quiet voice took on a deep note of sadness. Nevertheless, he remained steadfast in his oud, composing music even while on his deathbed, as if resisting death with music.

The final return to Cairo

When Baligh returned to Egypt after his acquittal, his fans and friends welcomed him with tears and joy, but Cairo was no longer the same as he had left it. Art had changed, names had changed, and public taste was drifting toward

fast-paced rhythms that did not resemble his grand project. Yet, he was not sad. He would say, "I did what I could... and time will take the rest."

He continued to work quietly, composing for Warda, Mayada El Hennawy, and Ali El Haggar, and trying to open the door to a new generation. But deep down, he knew his days were waning and the end was approaching.

silent departure

On September 12, 1993, the curtain fell on the life of the passionate musician. Baligh Hamdi passed away in a Cairo hospital at the age of sixty-two. The end was silent, without lights or festivals. The state did not celebrate him as it should have, nor was he given a funeral worthy of one of the greatest men Egypt has ever produced. But the tears of the people in the streets were more sincere than any official appearances.

On that day, his fans felt as if a string had been cut from Egypt's oud, and that the man who had given them more

than 1,500 melodies had left in body, but remained present in their hearts.

A legacy of endless melodies

If we were to count Baligh's legacy, numbers would be insufficient. More than 1,500 melodies, dozens of operettas, immortal patriotic songs, timeless romantic songs, and popular songs that have become part of our heritage. But the true value lies not in the number, but in the quality. He was able to combine all forms of singing: romantic, popular, patriotic, theatrical, and Sufi. He left no door untouched, and no heart untouched with a melody.

Eloquent and artistic honesty

The secret to Baligh's immortality was in one word: honesty. He didn't compose to achieve personal glory, but because he was unable to live without music. Every melody for him was a confession, every song a piece of his heart. Perhaps that's why his melodies live on today,

because people felt that what they were hearing wasn't just music, but a pure human soul.

students without school

After his passing, many composers tried to imitate him, but none were able to create his school. Because Baligh wasn't a school in the traditional sense, he was a unique case. He would come up with a melody from a social gathering or a passing phrase, then transform it into a masterpiece. He didn't plan long, but rather let inspiration guide him, trusting that lightning would guide him to the right phrase. This method cannot be taught, and it cannot be replicated.

The meaning of eternity

Today, more than three decades after his passing, Baligh's melodies still live in every home. We hear "Sawaah" in cafes, "Ala Hasab Wedad Qalbi" at weddings, "Seerat Al-Hob" at evening gatherings, and "Ya Habibi Ya Masr" (Oh My Love, Oh Egypt) in schools. Baligh has transcended

time and has become part of the collective memory of Egyptians and Arabs.

Immortality is not about living long, but about leaving an indelible mark. And Baligh left an impact the size of a nation.

A Sufi touch in the end

In his final moments, he was said to have been humming melodies as if reciting a Sufi rosary. For him, death was not an end, but a transition to another realm where the music never ceases. Perhaps he saw his passing as a return to the origin, to the cosmic music he had been trying to express throughout his life.

Thus, Baligh Hamdi's life ended, but his legacy will never end. His voice will continue to resonate in the melodies of Warda, Halim, Umm Kulthum, Shadia, Rushdi, and all those who sang from his heart. He will remain present whenever Egyptians cry or rejoice, whenever they love or fight.

Baligh was not just a composer, but a poet of melody, a lover of the land and its people, and a voice for the homeland. His body is gone, but his melody remains, his spirit remains, and his voice remains a whisper in Egypt's memory: an immortal whisper.

conclusion

The musician of existence and the composer of souls

In every era, a person emerges who is not just a passing individual, but transforms into the voice of an entire era, the spirit of an entire nation. There are those who write history with letters, there are those who record it with blood, and there are those who inscribe it with melodies. And music—with all the hidden secrets it carries—is the most profound book for reading existence, because it does not require a common language; rather, it is the language of souls. In the heart of the twentieth Arab century, the name of Baligh Hamdi emerged as one of those who did not content themselves with living their lives, but made their lives a string extending between earth and heaven.

Music as an existential reality

When we contemplate the essence of music, we find that it is most closely related to breathing. Man breathes to

stay alive, and music is the soul's breathing to remain connected to the Absolute. The Sufi philosophers of old said, "Every sound in the universe is glorification," and Baligh was a witness to this glorification, even interpreting it in the language of melody. He saw a song not merely as words sung, but as an emotional journey, beginning in the heart of the lover and ending in the heart of the listener, passing through a vast horizon of emotion and imagination.

The Oud as a Sufi Companion

For Baligh, the oud was more than just a musical instrument. It was his first friend, his mihrab, and his personal holy book. He would hold it like a Sufi holds his prayer beads, closing his eyes to lose himself in a melody that no one else could see. Many witnessed him entering a state of ecstasy while playing, as if cut off from place and time. He experienced what Sufis call "annihilation in melody," where the being dissolves into the sound, leaving only the absolute truth revealed in the melody.

The philosophy of simplicity

One of Baligh's greatest secrets was that he never sought complexity. He believed that the truth is simple, and that a melody that fails to touch the heart of the simple peasant is worthless. But he didn't confuse simplicity with superficiality; Baligh was able to write a very short melodic phrase, yet one that carried enough depth to be experienced for decades. He believed that true art is that which illuminates hearts, not just minds, and that music is not a display of talent, but rather an honest communication with people.

Between love and homeland

Baligh never separated love from homeland. He believed that human emotion is the other side of national emotion. When he composed for his beloved, we hear the homeland in the background of the melody, and when he composed for the homeland, we hear the lover's hidden heart. Therefore, his patriotic songs, such as "Ada Al-Nahar" and "Ya Habibi Ya Masr," carried within them

human longing, as if they were love poems, while his romantic songs, such as "Seerat Al-Hob" and "Al-Oyoun Al-Sawd" (The Black Eyes), carried a collective power, as if they were a national anthem. He dissolved the boundaries between the private and the public, between the individual and the collective, to affirm that man is ultimately one being, and that love and homeland are two sides of the same coin.

presence and absence

Every great composer leaves an impact on their time, but Baligh transcended the present to become present even in his absence. What is the secret of this presence? It is sincerity. He put his heart into every melody, so the listener needed no mediator to understand him. And when his body was gone, his voice continued to resonate in every verse. Perhaps Baligh is the closest example of what the Sufis say: "The body dies, but the soul remains present in the melody." He never truly left; he still lives

on in our melodies, in our joys and sorrows, in moments of triumph and defeat.

The man behind the melody

But it is important to see Baligh as a human being, not just a symbol. He was a highly sensitive man, an overly passionate lover, quick to anger and quick to be satisfied. He experienced love with all its heart with Warda Al-Jazairia, experienced pain in his Parisian exile, and experienced hope while dreaming of Akhenaten's opera. His life was not a stable one, but rather a series of storms, but these storms all transformed into melodies. He made himself a clear mirror, everything he experienced reflected in a melody.

Baligh as a musical philosopher

We may not see him as a philosopher in the academic sense, but he was a philosopher in the existential sense. He believed that music could change a person's destiny, and that a sincere melody could be more powerful than a political speech or an intellectual essay. He always said

that a song is not written with words alone, but with the tears behind them. This philosophical view led him to connect art to life, not as an adornment, but as one of its essences.

The Sufi Lover

Deep down, Baligh was a true Sufi. He didn't proclaim this in his sermons or statements, but he practiced it in his life and his music. A Sufi sees the world as a reflection of the highest truth, and Baligh saw this truth in every sound. Therefore, his melodies always carried a spiritual dimension, even in the simplest of folk songs. He believed that joy itself was an act of worship, and that singing could be a path to God as much as it was a path to the human heart.

Why do we read Baligh's biography?

The reader may wonder: Why read a composer's biography? Isn't art just a pleasure? The answer is that Baligh's biography is not just a story about music, but rather a human journey that carries within it a complete

philosophy of existence. When we read it, we learn that love can become a melody, that homeland can become a song, that exile can become a dirge, and that death itself can transform into endless music.

Baligh taught us that art is not a luxury, but the essence of our humanity. And whoever reads his biography, is in truth reading the biography of a nation, for his melodies were a mirror of Egypt in its joys and sorrows.

Thus, we stand on the threshold of this biography, as a traveler stands at the door of the Presence, preparing to enter a new station. We will read about his childhood in Shubra, where his first melody was born, about his beginnings with Fayda Kamel and Abdel Halim, about his meetings with Umm Kulthum and Warda, about his tales of folklore, about his theatrical dreams, about the nation's setback and victory, about a harsh exile and a sad return, and about a silent departure that left behind an immortal legacy.

But before we delve into the details, it's enough to put our ear to this man's heart to hear the greater truth: that music is the other side of life, and that Baligh Hamdi was a lover who never stopped playing in the sanctuary of existence.

When we close the pages of Baligh Hamdi's biography, we don't feel as if we have closed a book about a man who has passed away. Rather, we feel as if we have left behind an oud that continues to play in a hidden place, a note that still echoes in space, untouched by death or exile. For Baligh, as his fans knew him, was not merely a composer, but a spiritual phenomenon, a lover as vast as a homeland, a voice as vast as a nation, and a secret as vast as the universe.

The man who became a melody

Perhaps Baligh's greatness lay in the fact that he did not content himself with creating melodies to be sung, but rather transformed himself into an extended melody. Everyone who approached him felt as if he were living in

a constant state of music; even his silence was music. He was quick to anger and contentment, fickle like melodies, yet always sincere. He would laugh with all his heart, cry with all his soul, and then transform all of this into a musical phrase that immortalized the moment.

Therefore, when we mention his name, we are not just mentioning the biography of a person, but rather a collection of melodies that have become a collective memory for Egypt and the Arabs: "Sawaah," "Ada Al-Nahar," "Seerat Al-Hob," "Al-Oyoun Al-Sawd," and "Ya Habibi Ya Masr." It is as if the man has dissolved into his melodies, his existence no longer separate from them.

The Sufi who composed the melody of existence

Sufism says that everything in the universe is "sound," and that every atom in existence speaks the name of the Creator. Baligh was closest to this understanding. He didn't play to impress people, but rather because he saw in every tune a manifestation of the truth. His popular tunes were not merely dance and amusement, but

supplications disguised as a mawwal. His patriotic tunes were not slogans, but collective prayers for the homeland. His emotional tunes were not merely love songs, but an attempt to understand the secret of universal love.

Baligh was, at heart, a musical traveler, ascending the ranks of melody as Sufis ascend the ranks of the soul: from simplicity to depth, from joy to sorrow, from earth to heaven. His melodies thus remain alive, for they emerged from a spiritual journey, not merely from a professional craft.

The philosophy behind the melody

Ancient philosophers said that music is "the science of the harmony of sounds," but Baligh proved that music is also "the philosophy of the harmony of souls." He believed that a song can only live if it touches the human essence within us. That's why he didn't care much for theorizing, but rather said, "Melody is born like a child... if you don't capture it in its moment, it is lost forever."

This phrase captures his philosophy: Life is a moment of truth, and art is also a moment of truth. It cannot be artificial, nor can it be crafted in closed laboratories. Therefore, his melodies always carry the warmth of the moment and the sincerity of feeling, even if they appear simple on the surface.

presence in absence

Baligh departed physically in 1993, but his absence was more like a presence. There is no national occasion without his melodies returning, no evening gathering without a collection of his tunes appearing, and no lover without his story echoing in one of his songs. He achieved what every creative person strives for: to transcend the limits of their body and time, transforming into an immortal voice.

Here the Sufi dimension appears once again: for the Sufi, death is not an end, but an absence in presence, and Baligh became an example of this. His body was absent, but his presence was multiplied, for he was no longer an

individual, but rather music distributed throughout every home, every heart.

Baligh and the Homeland: The Great Tale

When we contemplate Baligh's career, we discover that his entire life was a story about Egypt. He grew up in a working-class neighborhood, carried folklore in his heart, sang with Abdel Halim, the voice of the revolution, composed for Umm Kulthum, the voice of eternity, loved Warda as a symbol of unquenchable love, disappeared into exile as Egypt disappeared during its setback, and returned as the homeland returned after victory. Even his departure was silent, like many of the nation's silent moments, but his legacy was resounding, like its great victories.

Baligh was a mirror of his homeland: its weakness and strength, its pain and joy, its exile and its triumph. From here, we understand the secret of people's connection to his melodies: because, quite simply, they are their lives, in his voice.

The essence of greatness

Greatness lies not in quantity, although Baligh left behind more than 1,500 melodies. Nor in fame, although he filled the ears and eyes with his presence. True greatness lies in the fact that the man changed the nature of Arabic listening. After Baligh, song was no longer the same as it was before him. He made it more vital, closer to the people, more sincere, and more deeply impactful.

The greatness also lies in the fact that it combined all genres: popular, classical, national, Sufi, and theatrical. He did not confine himself to one genre; rather, he was an open sea. And whoever enters this sea will not leave the same way he entered.

Mohi El-Din Ibrahim

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